

VZCZCXYZ0012
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #2614/01 3480826
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 140826Z DEC 07
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7604
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7540
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8817

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 002614

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.- CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage December 14 on the death threats President Chen Shui-bian has received recently; on the National Communications Commission's plan to regulate spam emails in Taiwan; on the plunge of Taiwan's stock price index Thursday; and on the 2008 elections. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said the United States' constant moves to oppose Taiwan's UN referendum were the results of Washington's affirmation of China's rise and its influence. Washington believes that it will endanger regional peace and stability if it fails to establish a strategic partnership with China, the article said. An analysis in the pro-unification "United Evening News" alleged that AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt's visit to Taiwan this time was aimed at demanding that President Chen "peacefully transfer" his presidential powers in 2008.

A "Black and White Column" commentary in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said Burghardt's recent visit to Taiwan shows that the US is taking preventive measures as Chen Shui-bian's hidden intentions were being exposed. An op-ed article by a prominent Taiwan professor of political science in the same newspaper commented that the US is now the decision-maker of the Taiwan unification-or-independence issue.
End summary.

A) "A 'Chinese War' Is Going on"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (12/14):

"... [Ever] since Taiwan proposed to hold a UN referendum, the United States has been constantly imposing pressure on the island by having relevant officials openly deliver statements or come to Taiwan and talk to the ruling and opposition political figures. Even with constant U.S. moves and the increasing intensity of its opposition, the United States still failed to alter the process of the UN referendum. But such moves highlighted that the United States tends to tilt toward China, a trend that implies a concealed concern that cross-Straits situation might get out of control. ...

"... But we have discovered that the reason why Washington has constantly imposed pressure on Taiwan [over the UN referendum] was because it wants to show it to Beijing. What is curious is, since opposition to the UN referendum is a violation of the democratic spirit and international practice, why did the United States choose to sabotage its own image just to placate China? The key lies in the fact that the United States seems to have affirmed China's rise and its influence, believing that regional peace and stability will be endangered should [the United States] fail to establish a strategic partnership with China. Therefore, under China's pressure, [Washington felt that] it must 'do something' about the UN referendum so as to resolve China's doubts and insecurity. ..."

B) "Peaceful Change of Leadership? The United States Might Not Be Able to Sleep Well at Night"

Journalist Chen Chih-ping noted in the "Cold Eyes" column in the pro-unification "United Evening News" [circulation: 100,000] (12/11):

"In the wake of a series of fruitless remarks and communications with Taiwan, AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt came to Taiwan personally to communicate with Bian and Frank Hsieh. Based on the messages revealed from various parties after [Burghardt's] talks [with different individuals], the most important message that the United States wanted to deliver this time was to demand that Chen Shui-bian 'peacefully transfer' his presidential powers next year, regardless of whether it is Ma Ying-jeou or Frank Hsieh who is elected president March 22, 2008. ...

"To conclude on Burghardt's trip this time, the demand that Chen 'peacefully transfer' his presidential power should be viewed as its principal axis, whereas its various aspects include: First, [Washington wants] to ensure that the Bian administration will not go to extremes. Burghardt therefore revealed that [the United States] has expressed hopes to China that the latter should resume dialogue with Taiwan's new leader. The move was aimed at taking away any possibility that Chen might use China's tough position as an excuse to initiate radical action.

"Second, [Washington wants] to ensure that the presidential election slated for March 22, 2008 will be held as planned. The United States thus expressed concerns about President Chen's recent comments on the martial law. The American Institute in Taiwan is also reportedly closely watching the Bian administration's recent ban on a former national security official to publish his books and is prudently interpreting whether the Bian administration is regressing in terms of democracy.

"Third, [Washington wants] to make sure that its inability to manage the Bian administration will no longer exist in the wake of next year's presidential election, so as to secure a new situation for Washington-Beijing-Taipei ties.

"Fourth, [Washington wants] to make sure that the leadership can be peacefully transferred on May 20, regardless of whether it is transferred to Ma or Hsieh. Burghardt also emphasized that the United States' cross-Straits policy is based on the United States' interests. Washington has obviously noted attempts by the Bian administration to manipulate the anti-U.S. populist line by accusing Washington and Beijing of working jointly to suppress Taiwan. ..."

C) "Hidden Intentions Exposed"

The "Black and White Column" of the pro-unification "United Daily News" commented [circulation: 400,000] (12/13):

"... From this context, one can tell from the very solemn and negative reactions by Thomas Christensen and Raymond Burghardt to Bian's threatening words of 'considering martial law' that the series of words and deeds of [Chen Shui-bian], which violate the democratic and constitutional principles, as well as Minister of National Defense Lee Tien-yu's saying he would obey Bian's martial law order even if the parliament does not approve it, indeed alerted the US side that this is a serious matter. Any slightly indiscreet responses may well destroy Taiwan's democracy all at once.

"The US side has deeply experienced Bian's unpredictability. He once claimed that, if the Blue Camp wins the election, there would not be 'a transfer of power to another political party' but 'a transfer of sovereignty.' As seen by the Americans who advocate democratic elections, this means Bian is very likely to refuse a peaceful transfer of power. The hidden intentions [of Bian] have been exposed. The US side will certainly make preparatory arrangements in order to prevent anti-democratic fascist rule from appearing under Bian's manipulation. Or else, the US will be ashamed to face the people of Taiwan!"

D) "The Americans Interfere with Internal Affairs. Ma and Hsieh Bowing and Bending"

Professor Chih-yu Shih, Department of Political Science, National

Taiwan University, wrote in an op-ed in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (12/13):

"Washington's sending AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt as an envoy to Taiwan has brought a whirlwind. The main purpose was to criticize the referendum, saying it is a unilateral change in the status quo, violates the Four Noes pledge and binds the hands and feet of the new government [to be inaugurated] in 2008. Faced with such rude intervention, Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties, which always believe Taiwan to be an independent nation, do not seem to feel Taiwan's independence being violated.

"... Just seeing the over cautiousness of the people of Taiwan toward Burghardt, one will know that the rhetoric that Taiwan or the Republic of China is an independent nation is self-deception. In their heart of hearts, the people of Taiwan see the US as their master.

"Without any dissatisfaction, Beijing applauded Burghardt's open interference in Taiwan politics. Beijing's leadership may as well argue that the warning against Taiwan independence made by Burghardt during this visit was a result of [China's] pressure. This means that Washington takes Beijing seriously. Therefore, even though, theoretically, the US's interfering with Taiwan should be seen as interfering with China's internal affairs and [therefore] intolerable, it is tolerated for the time being. The fact is that, if Beijing does not interpret Burghardt's open interference this way and gives itself an out, Beijing would be in trouble justifying its position should the US intervene on its own when confrontation arises across the Strait.

"... From the long-term perspective, even if Chen Shui-bian's reaction to Burghardt's criticism may be described as obstinate and unruly, it can be explained that any changes in the future will have nothing to do with him. As for Ma Ying-jeou and Frank Hsieh's bowing and bending, they have acted as if the US were their father. If the US succeeded in gaining control over these two candidates for the presidency this time, does it mean that Taiwan is being pushed and tied more toward the US? Since the long-term trend is obvious, Taiwan independence advocacy naturally receive indirect encouragement. The referendum issue, as a result, will only evolve toward more confrontation.

"This trip by Burghardt appears commanding. All parts of Taiwan were careful and cautious. But Beijing is becoming marginalized. The habit that the leaders of both sides across the Strait have developed of taking their cues from the United States is too deep-rooted to be changed. The situation now is that unification depends on the US and independence also depends on the US. Both sides across the Strait have high talk of nationalism. However, thus far there has been no confrontation, because the master has not told them to start fighting."

YOUNG